

## What I Believe — by Laura Finan — Sunday, April 24, 2011

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Whenever I am asked about my religious background I offer: 12 years of Catholic School. Twelve years of uniforms and knee socks, Holy Days and Sunday Mass. Twelve years of nuns and rules, school bus rides and sacraments. But mostly, with thanks to my parents, 12 years of great education. There I learned discipline and academics, but the most important thing I learned in Catholic school was how to think for myself. It's a strange dynamic, because so much of the "mystery of the faith" comes into question over the course of those twelve years.

We were taught that the death of Jesus was a sacrifice of proof, a necessary step in the path to resurrection; that without this death we would not find freedom at our own lives' end. During the course of a year in the Catholic faith, there is no day more holy than Easter Sunday; the day Jesus Christ fulfilled his promise to his followers, the day he proved his true identity by opening the gates of heaven to all those who would follow him there.

As a child in Catholic school, I was taught the glory of the miracle of the resurrection of Christ, yet as majestic a thing as that was, the glory that mattered most to me was that I had Holy Thursday and Good Friday off, two extra days than my public school friends. Adding to that glory was the true resplendence of meatless Fridays ...the time of year that in my house we were guaranteed at least two nights of pancakes and French toast for dinner. And the lead up was just as magical. There was shopping for a new dress, new hat, gloves, and if we were very lucky, or there was a "good sale", a new purse! To my three sisters and me Easter was a celebration of food and fashion.

Beyond those superfluous benefits, my religious upbringing ingrained in me the singular importance of the miracle of Easter Sunday. There was no day more important in the year. For Easter Sunday was the only day in the year that I was allowed to eat chocolate for breakfast! This was my miracle. It was the one day in the year that Mass was exciting, not because of the flowers and incense, or the great hoards of people who only showed up on that day and on Christmas but because some of that chocolate made its way from my Easter basket to my new Easter purse to be sampled during the noisier parts of the service. I recall with unparalleled detail the feeling of the wooden pew beneath my legs, feet dangling, as I unwrapped the shiny blue egg in my white cotton covered hands, and the anticipation of the waxy chocolate melting in my mouth.

As time moved on and I grew into adulthood, Easter lost some of its luster. I do not believe in the Trinity. I can eat pancakes for dinner and chocolate for breakfast whenever I like, and I am no longer a Catholic. But here is what I have retained: Easter is the ambassador of Spring, a time for renewal, a time to smell the flowers, bask in the glory of color the earth releases. It is a time to see with new eyes, to wake up and listen to my inner voice of hope. It's the time to let in the light, soak up the sun and look to the future, knowing full well as I celebrate in the joy of family, that this *is* heaven.